

FACT SHEET - The Status of Ducks, August 2005

Mid-Continent Areas: Habitat conditions during the May Waterfowl Breeding Survey were variable. The U.S. Prairies were generally in poorer condition than last year, the Canadian Prairies were in slightly better condition, and the Canadian Parklands were in much better condition than last year. Overall, the pond count in the mid-continent region increased 37% over last year and was 12% higher than the long-term average. The Prairies received substantial rain in late May and June that recharged wetlands and encouraged growth of vegetation. While this improved habitat quality on the Prairies, it probably came too late to benefit early-nesting species or prevent over-flight. The heavy rain likely benefited late nesting species and re-nesting efforts.

In the traditional survey area, the total duck population estimate was 31.7 million birds, which is similar to last year's estimate (32.2 million) and 5% below the 1955-2004 average. Most of the principal duck species surveyed were similar to last year, but 4 species are below their long-term average.

- The breeding population estimate for mallards in 2005 (6.8 million) was 9% below last year (7.4 million) and 10% below the long-term average. The projected mid-continent mallard fall-flight index is 9.3 million birds which is similar to the 2004 estimate.
- Gadwall (2.2 million) numbers were 16% below 2004 but 30% above their long term average.
- American widgeon (2.2 million) were similar to 2004 but 15% below the long term average.
- Green-winged teal (2.2 million) were similar to 2004 and 16% above the long term average.
- Blue-winged teal (4.6 million birds) were similar to 2004 and the long-term average.
- Northern shovelers (3.6 million) were 28% above 2004 and 67% above the long term average.
- Redheads (605,000) were similar to 2004 and the long term average (625,000).
- Pintail, canvasback and scaup continue to be species of concern. Pintails (2.5 million) increased 17% from last year but remain 38% below their long term average. Scaup (3.3 million) dropped 11% from 2004, fell 35% below their long term average and reached an all time low. Canvasbacks (521,000) were similar to 2004 and their long term average.

Eastern Breeding Areas: In the eastern U.S. and eastern Canada, habitat conditions were reported as good, and areas of Quebec (including James Bay Lowlands), Newfoundland and Labrador were reported as excellent. However, some areas, especially near the coast, experience cool temperatures, heavy rains and flooding near peak hatch, likely resulting in loss of nests and broods. In some areas, this likely caused a delay in nesting or re-nesting phenology.

- Breeding population estimates for the Eastern Survey Area surveyed were either similar or below last year and all were near their 1996-2004 averages. Changes from 2004 were noted for mergansers (-25%), mallards (-36%), black ducks (-24%) and green-winged teal (-46%).

Virginia: A cold, damp spring appeared to have delayed nesting. For coastal nesting birds, winter storm events reduced residual cover for early nesting birds and spring tidal flooding during peak nesting may have also diminished production. However, conditions for inland nesting birds were more favorable as increased winter and spring precipitation improved waterfowl habitats. Overall production is expected to be average.

- In Virginia the breeding pair estimate for mallards (32,713) decreased slightly this year while the wood duck estimate (16,697) declined 20%. Local black duck numbers (2,290) increased slightly from last year but continue to be of concern due to loss of available nesting habitat.